

# The Impact Arminius Left on His Nine Orphan Children

In my readings in *The Works of Arminius*, I stumbled across a letter of dedication from Arminius' nine orphan children to a William Bardesius on August 13, 1612. Bardesius was a Lieutenant of Warmenhysen, and the orphan's patron whom they wanted to honor with this letter and the commentary on Romans by Arminius. I almost ignored reading this letter, thinking that it would not offer anything of real value to the study of Arminius and his theology. It did not take me long to realize that I was wrong. What they communicate gives us some valuable insights into how they understood and were impacted by Arminius and his writings. I will quote them for most of this sixteen page letter before concluding with my own summary and observations.

## *MOST HONORABLE AND NOBLE SIR:*

THAT expression of the apostle Paul, by which he designates the doctrine of the gospel as "the truth which is according to godliness," (Titus 1:1) is very remarkable and worthy of perpetual consideration. From this sentiment, with the leave of all good men, we may collect that this "truth" neither consists in naked theory and inane speculation, nor in those things which, belonging to mere abstract knowledge, only play about the brain of man, and which never extend to the reformation of their will and affections. But it consists in those things which imbue the mind with a sincere fear of God, and with a true love of solid piety, and which render men "zealous of good works." Another passage, not less famous and remarkable, in the same epistle and by the same apostle, tends greatly to confirm and illustrate this view of the matter; it is thus expressed: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." (Titus 2:11,12.) Whosoever they be, therefore, that profess themselves the heralds of this divine "truth," they ought to give additional diligence that, casting aside all curious and thorny questions, and those idle subtilities which derive their origin from human vanity, they commend to their hearers this one and only "godliness," and that they seriously instruct them in faith, hope and charity. And, in return, those of their auditors who are enamored with this "truth," are bound strenuously to conform themselves to this course of conduct — to pass by and to slight all other things which may come across their path, and constantly to aim at this "godliness" alone, and keep their eyes intent upon it. For both clergy and laity may receive this as a principle, that they are yet rude and complete strangers in true theology, unless they have learned so to

theologize, that theology may bear the torch before them to that piety and holiness which they sedulously and earnestly pursue.

If this admonition ever was necessary, it is undoubtedly the more necessary at this time; because we see impiety overflowing in every direction, like a sea raging and agitated by whirlwinds. Yet, amidst all this storm, such are the stupor and insensibility of men, that not a few who remain exactly the same persons as they formerly were, and who, indeed, have not changed the least particle of the manner of their impure life, still imagine themselves to be in the class of prime Christians, and promise themselves the favor of the supreme God, the possessing of heaven and of life eternal, and of the company of Christ and of the blessed angels, with such great and presumptuous confidence, and with such security of mind, that they consider themselves to be atrociously injured by those who, judging them to be deceived in this their self-persuasion, desire them in any wise to entertain doubts about it. In a condition of affairs thus deplorable, no endeavor appears to be more laudable, than to institute a diligent inquiry into the causes of such a pernicious evil, and, by employing a saving remedy, to arouse erring souls from this diabolical lethargy, and induce them to alter their lives, under the felicitous auspices of the gospel and the Spirit of Christ, to devote their energies to a solid amendment of manners, and thus, at length, from the divine word, to promise themselves, when answering this description, grace with God and eternal glory.

The causes of this evil are various, and most of them consist in certain erroneous and false conceptions which, being impressed on their minds, some men carry about with them, being either their own inventions, or furnished to them from some other quarter; yet, either in general or in particular, either directly or indirectly, such erroneous conceptions lay a stumbling-block and an impediment before the true and serious study of piety and the pursuit of virtue. . . .

We now begin to make some observations on those hypotheses, whether secret or avowed, which are injurious to piety, and which obtain among Christians themselves, whether they be publicly defended or otherwise. Among them, the first which comes under enumeration, is the dogma of unconditional predestination, with those which depend on it by a necessary connection; and, in particular, the so highly extolled perseverance of the saints, in a confidence in which such things are uttered by some persons as we dread to recite, for they are utterly unworthy of entering into the ear of Christians. It is no small impediment which these dogmas [unconditional predestination and perseverance] place in the way of piety. When, after a diligent and often-repeated perusal of the Holy Scriptures, after long meditations and ardent prayers to God, with fasting, our father, of blessed memory, thought that he had made a sure discovery of the baneful tendency of these dogmas, and had reflected upon them within his own breast, and that, however strenuously they might be urged by certain divines, and generally instilled into the minds of students by scholastic exercises, yet neither the ancient church nor the modern, after a previous lawful examination of them, ever received them or allowed them to pass into matters that had obtained mature adjudication. When he perceived these things, he began by degrees, to propose his difficulties about them, and his objections against them, for the purpose of shewing that they were not so firmly founded in the Scriptures as they are generally supposed to be; and, in process of time, being still more strongly confirmed in the knowledge of the truth, especially after the conference which he had with Doctor Francis Junius, and in which he had seen the

weakness of his replies, he began to attack those dogmas with greater boldness; yet on no occasion was he forgetful of the modesty which so eminently became him. But, of the arguments with which he attacked those dogmas, this [on the seventh chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans] in which we have now engaged, was not the last — that is, such was the nature of these doctrines that they were calculated to relax the study of piety, and thus to extinguish it. In that labor he also occasionally employed subtleties. and such reasons as are not at once obvious to the multitude; but they were subtle distinctions, necessary for overturning dogmas which, in his judgment, were very baneful. And, undoubtedly, as love is not conquered except by another love, so that subtlety, which is the inventor and establisher of falsehood, can scarcely be conquered and overturned without the subtlety which is the assertor of the truth and the convictor of falsehood. Therefore, the subtleties which he employed on that occasion, [his conference with Junius,] were useful and necessary — not insignificant, trifling, and invented for pleasure, ostentation or display. But with regard to other things, it is known to all those who were on terms of familiarity with him — especially during the last years of his life, when he was much engaged in the schools, in which it is an established custom principally to pursue subtleties — what a rigid enemy he was of all subtleties and of lofty language; and even those whom he had among his students that differed on some other points from him, could testify, if they would conscientiously relate the truth, that he referred all things to use and to the practice of a Christian life; and thus that piety and the fear of the divine Majesty uniformly breathed in his lectures, in his disputations, (both public and private,) in his sermons, discourses and writings. But it is not necessary for us, in this place, to rehearse the method by which he proved the genius of unconditional predestination and its annexed dogmas to be adverse to godliness; because his writings on this subject are partly extant, and the remainder, under the divine auspices, will soon be published. It is better that prudent readers should listen to him uttering his own words, than to us who are but stammerers about him. The water is sweeter which we taste at the fountain, than that which we drink at a distance from the spring. . . .

A capital error which first offers itself, and which closely adheres to the inmost core and fibers of nearly all mankind, is that by which they silently imagine in their own minds that illimitable mercy exists in God; and from this they opine that they will not be rejected, though they have indulged themselves a little too much in vicious pursuits, but that, on the contrary, they will continue to be dear to God and beloved. This error is in reality joined with notorious incredulity, and, in a great measure destroys the Christian religion, which is founded on the blood of Christ. For, in this way, is removed all necessity for a pious life, and a manifest contradiction is given to the declaration of the apostle, in which he affirms that “without holiness no man shall see God.” (Hebrews 12:14) Alas for the insanity of men, who have the audacity to bless themselves when they are cursed by God!

This is succeeded by the false hypothesis of others, who, revolving in their minds the designs, the morals, and the life of mortals, and reflecting on the multitude, among men of all orders, of those who are wandering in error, conclude that the mercy of God will not permit eternally to perish so many and such infinite myriads of rational creatures, formed after the divine image. The consequence is, that, instead of performing their duty according to the tenor of Christianity, by opposing the torrent of impiety, they, on the contrary, suffer themselves to be carried away by the impulse of such views, and

associate with the multitudes of those who are devious in error. They seem to forget that the many walk in the broad way, whose end, according to the truth of God, will be “destruction from the presence of the Lord.” A multitude will preserve no man from perdition. Unhappy and most miserable solace, to have many companions in enduring everlasting punishment!

Let the force of this deception, likewise, be considered, that vices are dignified with the names of virtues, and, on the other hand, virtues receive the defiling appellation of vices. The effect of this is, that men, who are of themselves, prone to vicious indulgences, pursue them with the greater avidity when they are concealed under the mask of virtues, and, on the contrary, are terrified at virtues, in the attainment of which any difficulty is involved, as though they were clothed in the monstrous garb of the most horrid vices. Thus, among mankind, drunkenness obtains the name of hilarity; and filthy talking, that of cheerful freedom; while sobriety in food and drink, and simplicity in dress, are opprobriously styled hypocrisy. This is really to “call good evil, and evil good,” and to seek an occasion, by which a man may cease from the practice of virtue, and devote himself to vicious courses, not only without any reluctance of conscience, but likewise at the impulse and instigation of his [seared] conscience. Into this enumeration, must come that shameful and false reasoning by which unwise men infer, from those passages in Scripture in which we are said to be justified by faith without works, that it is not, therefore, necessary to attend to good works, they being of such a nature that without them we may be justified, and, therefore, saved. They never advert to the fact that, in other passages, it is recorded — True faith, that is, the faith by which we are justified, must be efficacious through charity; and that faith, without works, is dead, and resembles a lifeless carcass.

This vain idea also, in no trifling degree, consoles the men who try to flatter themselves in those vices to which they have a constitutional propensity — that they are not given up to all vices, they have not run into every excess of wickedness, but, though addicted to certain vices peculiar to themselves, they feel an abhorrence for all others. As men are most ingenious in the invention of excuses for themselves, in support of this incorrect view are generally cited these common phrases: “No man lives without sin;” “Every man is captivated by that which he finds to be pleasing to himself.” Such men, therefore, consider themselves to be true Christians, and that, on this account, it will be eternally well with them, when, as they foolishly persuade themselves, they abstain from most evils, and, as for the rest, they cherish only some one vice, a single Herodias alone. A most absurd invention! since no one is, no one can be, addicted to all vices at once; because some among them are diametrically opposed to others, and are mutual expellers. If this conceit be allowed, no mortal man either will or can be impious. The subjoined passage in the epistle of St. James ought to recur to the remembrance of these persons: “Whosoever shall offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (2:10.) We are also commanded to “lay aside,” not some one, but “all malice, guile, and hypocrisy,” (1 Peter 2:1,) that we may thus the more fully devote ourselves to God.

Others suppose that, if in some degree their affections be partly drawn out towards God and goodness, they have adequately discharged their duty, though in some other part of their affections they are devoted to the service of the prince of this world and of sin. These men assuredly have forgotten, that God must be adored and loved with the whole affections of the heart — that the Lord God of Heaven, and the prince of this world, are

opposing masters, and, therefore, that it is impossible to render service to both of them at once, as our Savior has most expressly declared.

Not very dissimilar from this is that invention by which some persons divide their time into portions, and when they have marked off one part for God and Christ, and another part for the flesh and the affections, they imagine that they have most excellently performed their duty. But these men, whosoever they be, never reflect that our whole lives, and all the time of which they are composed, must be consecrated to God, and that we must persevere in the ways of piety and obedience to the close of life; and for this brief obedience of a time which is short at the longest, God has, of grace, covenanted to bestow on the obedient, that great reward of life eternal. Undoubtedly, if at any time a man falls, he cannot return into favor with God until he has not only deplored that fall by a sincere repentance, and is again converted in his heart to God, with this determination — that he will devote the remaining days of his life to God.

Those men must not be forgotten who are in this heresy — that all those things which are not joined with blasphemy to God, and with notorious injury and violence to one's neighbor, and which, with regard to other things, bear the semblance of charity and benevolence, are not to be reckoned among the multitude of sins. According to their doctrine, they are at liberty to indulge their natural relish for earthly things, to serve their belly, to take especial care of themselves, to gratify their sensual and drunken propensities, to live the short and merry life which Epicurus recommends, and to do whatsoever a heart which is inclined to pleasure shall command; provided they abstain from anger, hatred, the desire of revenge, bitterness and malice, and the other passions which are armed for force and injury. If we follow these masters, we shall assuredly discover a far more easy and expeditious way to heaven, than that which has been taught us by the divine ambassador of the great God, whose sole business it was to point out the way to heaven.

Occasion is also afforded to unjust conceptions respecting the extreme of piety, by the mode in which some theological subjects are treated, and by some ecclesiastical phrases which are either not sufficiently conformable to the Scriptures, or which are not correctly understood. We must briefly, and without much regard to order, animadvert on a few of these, for the sake of example. When our good works are invested with the relation of gratitude towards God, it is a well ascertained fact, that men collect from this that they are now the heirs and proprietors of life eternal, and are in a state of grace and everlasting salvation, before they ever begin to perform good works. This delusion makes them think it expedient also to follow the hypothesis that the performance of good works is not absolutely necessary. In this case, it must be maintained from the Scriptures, that a true conversion and the performance of good works form a prerequisite condition before justification, according to this passage from St. John, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) This is consonant with that celebrated passage in Isaiah, in which the Lord promises to the Jews the cleansing and the destruction of all their sins, even those which were of the most aggravated kind, after they turned themselves to him, and corrected their ways. (Isaiah 1:15-20.) When the sacraments are considered only in the light of sealing to us the promises and the grace of God, but not as binding us to the performance of our duty and admonishing us of it, the discussion of them is not only defective, but it may also, through such defect, be accounted injurious to

the work of personal piety. "Believers and the regenerate are still prone and inclined to every evil;" and "the most holy among them have only the small beginnings of the obedience which is required." These are phrases which describe, in a manner far too low and weak, the efficacy of the new creation, and they are . . . in reality exceedingly dangerous. For the former of these phrases seems entirely to remove all distinction between the regenerate and the, while the latter seems to place such minutiae of obedience in the regenerate, as will induce a man, who has been accustomed to bless himself if he perceives even the slightest thought or motion about the performance of obedience, immediately to conclude himself to be a partaker of true regeneration.

When the continued imperfection of the regenerate, and the impossibility of keeping the law in this life, are urged unseasonably and beyond measure, without the addition of what may be done by holy men through faith and the Spirit of Christ, the thought is apt to suggest itself to the mind even of the most pious of their hearers, that they can do nothing which is at all good. Through this erroneous view, it happens that sometimes far less is attributed to the regenerate than the unregenerate are themselves able to perform. The ancient church did not reckon the question about the impossibility of performing the law among those which are capital: This is apparent from St. Augustine himself, who expresses a wish that Pelagius would acknowledge it possible to be performed by the grace of Christ, and declares that peace would then be concluded. The apostles of Christ were themselves occupied in endeavoring to convince men, when placed out of the influence of grace, of their incapability to perform obedience. But about the imperfection and impotency of the regenerate, you will scarcely find them employing a single expression. On the contrary, they attribute to believers the crucifying of the flesh and the affections, the mortification of the works of the flesh, a resurrection to a new life, and walking according to the Spirit; and they are not afraid openly to protest, that by faith they overcome the world. The acknowledgment of their imperfection was but a small matter, because that was a thing previous to Christianity. But the glory of Christians lies in this — that they know the power of the resurrection of Christ, and, being led by the Spirit of God, they live according to the purest light of the gospel. The distribution of theology into God, and the acts of God, introduces to us a speculative religion, and is not sufficiently well calculated to urge men to the performance of their duty. To this may be added that too subtle disquisition, which is an invention unsanctioned by Scripture, about the relations of those acts which are performed by us.

As unsuitable for the promotion of piety, seems likewise that deduction or dispensation of our religion, by which all things are directed to the assurance of special mercy as the principal part of our duty, and to the consolation which is elicited from it against the despair that is opposed to it, but in which all things are not directed to the necessary performance of obedience in opposition to security. It derives its origin from the idea that greater fear ought to be entertained respecting despair than respecting security, when the contrary to this is the truth. For in the whole history of the Old and New Testament, which comprises a period of so many thousand years, only a single instance occurs of a person in despair, and that was Judas Iscariot, the perfidious betrayer of his Savior — the case of Cain being entirely out of the question; while, on the contrary, as the world was formerly, so is it now, very full of persons in a state of security, and negligent of the duty divinely imposed on them; yet these men, in the mean

time, sweetly bless their souls, and promise themselves grace and peace from God in full measure.

To proceed further: To these and all other delusions of a similar nature, we ought to oppose a soul truly pious, and most firmly rooted in the faith of God and Christ, exercising much solicitous caution about this — not to be called off from the serious and solid study of piety, and not to yield ourselves up to sins or to take delight in them, either through the deceptive force of any conceits, such as have now been enumerated or any others, or by the incautious use of any phrases and the sinister distortion of particular subjects; but, on the contrary, denying all ungodliness, let us sedulously and constantly walk in the paths of virtue; and let us always bear in mind the very serious admonition which the apostle Paul propounds to the Ephesians; having dehorted them from indulging in impurity and other crimes, he says: “Let no man deceive you with vain words” or reasons; “for, because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Verse 6) It is worthy of observation, how significantly the hypothesis and arguments on which men depend when they bless themselves in their vices, are designated as “vain speeches;” For “vain” they truly are; that is, false and deceitful are those reasons with which men are deceived while they are in bondage to their lusts, and persuade themselves that they are in a state of grace and salvation, when, on the contrary, they are in a state of wrath and eternal perdition; than which, no other more capital imposture or deception can be produced.

But, beside those things of which we have made previous mention, and which place obstructions to the progress of piety, another also occurs, which particularly belongs to the subject on which we are now treating; that is, the depraved and perverted interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, by which, in general, either all attention to good works is superseded, or in particular some part of it is weakened. This kind of hindrance ought undoubtedly to be reckoned among those which are the greatest; for thus either evil itself seems to be established by divine authority, or a more remiss pursuit of good, which, of the two, is without exception the greater evil. Wherefore, as all those persons deserve praise who endeavor to overturn every kind of hypothesis that is injurious to piety, so those among them are worthy of the highest commendation who try to give a correct interpretation, and such as is agreeable to “the form of sound words,” of those passages which are, through common abuse, generally so explained as, by such exposition, either directly or indirectly to countenance a disorderly course of life — to free them from such a depraved interpretation, and to act as torch-bearers, in a thing so useful and necessary to Christian people and chiefly to the pastors of the church. Many are those passages which are usually distorted to the injury of godliness; and from which we shall in this place select only the three following. . . .

(3.) In this number of abused passages is included the seventh chapter of the epistle of Paul to the Romans, from the fourteenth verse to the end of the chapter; that is, if the apostle be understood, in that chapter, to be speaking about a man who is regenerated.<sup>1</sup> For then it will follow that a renewed man is still “carnal, and sold under sin,” that is, the slave of sin; that “he wills to do good, but does it not; but the evil which he wills not, that

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<sup>1</sup> Arminius spends almost two hundred pages expounding on Romans 7 in his “Dissertation of the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” (*The Works of Arminius*, 2:488-683).

he does;" nay, that he is conquered, and "brought into captivity to the law of sin," that is, under the power and efficacy of sin. From this view it is further deduced, that, if any one be regenerate, it is sufficient for him "to will that which is good," though with a will that is incomplete, and that is not followed by action; and "not to will that which is evil," though he actually perpetrates it. If this view of that chapter be correct, then all attention to piety, the whole of new obedience, and thus the entire new creation, will be reduced to such narrow limits as to consist not in effects, but only in affections or feelings. Every man, at first sight, perceives how languid, cold and remiss such a belief will render all of us, both in our abstaining from evil, and in the performance of that which is good. Those, indeed, who defend this opinion, have their subterfuges and palliatives; but they are of such a kind, that the comment is generally repugnant to the text on which it is founded. With respect to the exercise of piety, it is dangerous for men to have this conceit previously impressed on their minds: "This chapter must be understood about regenerate persons;" for they who hold it as a foundation, in other things wander wherever they are led by their feelings, and never recollect the glosses proposed by their teachers. This effect was observed by St. Augustine, and being afraid of giving offense, in the more early period of his Christian career, he interpreted the passage as applicable to a man under the law, but in his latter days he applied it to a man under grace; but he held this opinion in a much milder form than it is now maintained, and almost without any injury to godliness. For "the good" which the apostle says "he willed but did not," St. Augustine interprets into "a refraining from concupiscence;" and "the evil" which the apostle declares "he willed not and yet did," he interprets as "an indulgence in concupiscence;" — though this novel interpretation involves a wonderful mixture of the preceptive and prohibitive parts of the law. Modern interpreters [among the Calvinists] understand it as relating to actual good and evil — a most notable distinction! But as our venerated father labored with all diligence in removing the other hindrances of piety, so did he principally expend much toil and unwearied study in searching out the true meaning of such passages of Scripture as were imperfectly understood, particularly if they placed a stumbling-block in the way of those who were studious of piety. If, in that species of labor, he ever had eminent success, it must undoubtedly be confessed that it was in his attempts on this seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans; for he wrote a commentary on it of great length, which, with the greatest accuracy, he prepared and finished, and which we now publish.

When he returned from Geneva to his native country, he understood this very chapter as it is now commonly explained; having been instructed in that view of it by his teachers, whose authority was so great among the students, that not one of the latter durst even inquire about any thing which they uttered. But when, in the exercise of his ministry in the church of Amsterdam, he had afterwards taken epistle to the Romans as the subject of a series of discourses from the pulpit, and when he had come to the explication of the seventh chapter, concerning the received interpretation of which he had then begun to conceive scruples in his mind, because it seemed both to undervalue the grace of regeneration and to diminish all zeal and attention to piety; he diligently considered the chapter from the beginning to the conclusion with a good conscience, as it was proper that he should do, and as the nature of his public function required; he collated it with those passages which preceded it and followed; he revolved all of them, in their several particulars, as in the presence of God; he read all the various commentators upon it which

he could procure, whether among the ancients, those of the middle ages, or among the moderns; and, at length, after having frequently invoked the name and aid of Almighty God, and having derived his chief human assistance from the commentaries of Bucer and Musculus on that part of Holy Writ, he discovered that the received interpretation could not bear the scrutiny of truth, but that the passage was to be entirely understood in reference to a man living under the law, in whom the law has discharged its office, and who, therefore, feeling true contrition in his soul on account of sins, and being convinced of the incapability of the law to save him, inquires after a deliverer, and is not, in fact, a regenerated man, but stands in the nearest grade to regeneration. This explanation of the chapter he publicly delivered from the pulpit; because he thought that such a course was allowable by the liberty of prophesying, which ought always to have a place in the church of Christ. Though this diligence in elucidating the Scriptures, and the candor which he displayed, deserved singular praise and commendation, especially from all persons of the ecclesiastical order, yet, by some zealots, in whom such a conduct was the least becoming, it was received in a manner which shewed that the author ranked no higher with them than as one who, instead of receiving a reward, ought to be charged with mischief and insanity. Such is the result of employing a sedulous care in the investigation of the Scriptures, and of cultivating the liberty of prophesying; and it is esteemed a preferable service, to render the servants of Christ the slaves of certain men who lived only a short time before ourselves, and almost to canonize their interpretation of the Scriptures as the only rule and guide for us in our interpretation.

When our father perceived these things, he began to write this commentary, which at length he brought to a conclusion. If God had granted him longer life, he would have corrected his production with greater accuracy, as he had already begun to do; but as he was prevented by death, and thus rendered incapable of giving it a final polish, and yet as, in the judgment of many great men, it is a work that is worthy to see the light, we have now ventured to publish it. Here then, Firstly, the author proposes his own sentiments, and proves them by deductions from the entire chapter, as well as from the connection in which it stands with the preceding and following chapters. Secondly. He shows that this interpretation has never been condemned, but has always had the greatest number of supporters. Thirdly. He defends it from the black charge of Pelagianism, and demonstrates that it is directly opposed to that error. Fourthly. He contends that the interpretation now generally received is quite new, and was never embraced by any of the ancients, but rejected by many of them. Lastly. And that it is injurious to grace and hurtful to good morals. He then enters into a comparison of the opinion of St. Augustine, and of that which is now generally received with his own interpretation; and concludes the work with a friendly address to his fellow-ministers.

It was our wish, most noble Bardesius, to dedicate and address this work to your mightiness; for this desire, we had several reasons. From the first entrance on his ministry, a sacred friendship subsisted between our revered father and that nobleman of honored memory, your excellent father — a friendship which continued till our venerable parent came down to the grave, full of years and loaded with honors. You, as the lawful inheritor of your father's possessions, have also succeeded in his place as the heir of his friendships; and this is the reason why the closest intimacy was formed between you and our good father, immediately after your return from your travels, which you had undertaken for the purpose of prosecuting your studies and visiting foreign nations. You

were accustomed to place a high estimate on his endowments, and frequently consulted him on questions of theology, and very often acted upon his advice — as he did, also, upon yours. But after he had reflected in his mind, that he was not the slave of men, but the servant of Jesus Christ, and that he was under an oath [to the observance of] his words alone, when, on this account, he had begun freely to inquire into the sentiments invented by men, and into their truth and necessity, and, after comparing them with the Scriptures, had also occasionally proposed, with great modesty, his doubts concerning them, and His animadversions on them — when for this reason, many of those who were formerly his acquaintances and intimate friends, became alienated from him as from one who had removed the ancient land-marks out of their places; and when some of them, by degrees, both in public and private, began either to take an occasion or to make one, to circulate sinister reports concerning him, while others, with sufficient plainness, openly renounced all friendship with him; and when the whole chorus of ecclesiastical zealots had excited each other to rise up against him; yet, amidst all these things, you took no offense, but, having weighed the matter in the just balance of your judgment, you persisted to cherish a constant love for him. When he was debilitated by a slow and constant malady, as soon as the mildness of the weather and the intervals in his disorder would permit his removal, you invited him to your house in a manner the most friendly, and, on his arrival, you received him as the angel of the Lord; and a friendship, thus pure and refined, you cultivated with him, until he departed out of this life, and ascended to Christ, his Lord and Master. Besides, after his decease, by your conduct to our afflicted family, you shewed yourself such a one as it became that man to be who was not a pretended friend to the survivors of his departed friend — affording, by words and deeds, such substantial proofs of your kindness and beneficence towards his sorrowing widow and distressed orphans, as far exceed the feebleness of our expressions. Therefore, unless we wished not only to be the most ungrateful of mortals, but likewise to be generally depicted as such, it was exceedingly proper in us, while the posthumous writings of our revered parent are occasionally issuing from the press, to inscribe some portion of them to your very honorable and most friendly name, and by this method, as by a public document, to testify at once before the whole world our gratitude to you as well as our vast obligations.

To these considerations, we may add that our father had determined within himself, if God had granted him life and leisure, to write a system of the whole Christian religion, not drawing it out of the stagnant lakes of Egypt, but out of the pure fountains of Israel, and to inscribe it to your mightiness. As he was unable to execute his purpose, partly through the multiplicity of his engagements, and partly through the lingering nature of his disorder, you have here, in the place of the other world, the present commentary; for in no other way than this, can the design of our father now be fulfilled. We hope the subject itself, which is treated in this commentary, will not be disagreeable to you; for it is one which is excellently accordant with your genius and disposition. It is a fact which is well known to all those who are acquainted with you and which you do not wish to be regarded as a secret, but which you openly profess, as often as occasion demands, that you take no delight in those thorny disputations and discussions which contribute nothing to the practice of the Christian life; but that you place the chief part of religion in the pursuit of real and solid piety. As our honored father also shows in this work that his wishes and purposes were in this respect similar to yours, we have thought that nothing could be more appropriate than to dedicate to a man of extensive learning, who is

likewise deeply attached to the interests of religion, a work which is highly conducive to the promotion of piety.

Accept, therefore, with a cheerful heart and a serene countenance, this small gift, which we and our dear mother are desirous to commit to posterity, that it may perpetually remain as an endless monument of that sacred friendship which subsisted between you and James Arminius, our venerated parent, and, at the same time, of our own great obligations to you. To you, who have been under the influence of mercy towards our afflicted family, may the Lord God in return shew mercy; and may he enrich you and your very honorable family with every kind of heavenly blessings, to the glory of his name and to the salvation of all of us! Amen.

So pray those who are most attached to your mightiness,

*THE NINE ORPHAN CHILDREN OF JAMES ARMINIUS, OF OUDEWATER.  
LEYDEN, 13th August, 1612.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Summary and Observations**

The orphans start out asserting that the same grace of God that saves us is the same grace that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. This is divine “truth” and whoever proclaims this truth ought to give diligence to commending this godliness to their hearers and instructing them in the way of faith, hope, and love. Furthermore, those committed to this truth are bound or obligated to strenuously conform their lives to this course of godly living; to constantly aim at and earnestly pursue this piety and holiness; and to keep their eyes upon it. In short, followers of Christ are to practice what they preach or they will wind up being complete strangers to true theology.

The orphans of Arminius saw the dogmas of unconditional predestination and the “highly extolled perseverance of the saints,” as being particularly injurious to the pursuit of holiness. They recommend that people read from their father’s writings and observe

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<sup>2</sup> *The Works of Arminius*, 2:472-487.

how he “proved the genius of unconditional predestination and its annexed dogmas to be adverse to godliness.”

One of the main errors the orphans saw people buying into was “though they have indulged themselves a little too much in vicious pursuits, . . . they will continue to be dear to God and beloved.” To them, such erroneous thinking “destroys the Christian religion,” removes “all necessity for a pious life,” and is in “manifest contradiction” to Hebrews 12:14, “without holiness no man shall see God.” Indeed, Scripture commands believers to “lay aside,” not some, “but ‘all malice, guile, and hypocrisy,’ (1 Peter 2:1,) that we may thus the more fully devote ourselves to God.”

Several times I noted the word “must” in their admonition. “God *must* be adored and loved with the whole affections of the heart.” “Our whole lives . . . *must* be consecrated to God, and that we *must* persevere in the ways of piety and obedience to the close of life; [for] God has, of grace, covenanted to bestow on the obedient, that great reward of life eternal.”

We would do well to follow their *admonition* “not to be called off from the serious and solid study of piety, and not to yield ourselves up to sins or to take delight in them . . . but, on the contrary, denying all ungodliness, let us . . . constantly walk in the paths of virtue.” Better yet,

“Let us always bear in mind the very serious *admonition* which the apostle Paul propounds to the Ephesians; having exhorted them from indulging in impurity and other crimes, he says: “Let no man deceive you with vain words” or reasons; “for, because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Verse 6) . . . For “vain” . . . that is, false and deceitful are those reasons with which men are deceived while they are in bondage to their lusts, and persuade themselves that they are in a state

of grace and salvation, when, on the contrary, they are in a state of wrath and eternal perdition . . . .”

I wholeheartedly agree with these orphans that “If this admonition ever was necessary, it is undoubtedly the more necessary at this time; because we see impiety overflowing in every direction, like a sea raging and agitated by whirlwinds.”

The theology expounded by these orphans in this letter is entirely consistent with Reformed Arminianism, and this should not surprise us since they were deeply influenced by their Father’s teachings. It is this theology that will provide “a saving remedy” for the ungodliness overflowing in every direction around us. Everyone would be wise to follow their recommendation and drink from the fountain of their Father’s writings and from other Reformed Arminians as well.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This paper was completed in December 2009, by Steve Witzki.